

The latest citizen sacrifice: Hikers

The city of Phoenix is getting ready to bleed yet another passionate segment of its citizenry, hitting them up for a few more dollars because they truly care about a narrow aspect of city life and are willing to pay more for it.

Then the city will turn around and give that money to its employees. There is insufficient backbone to say no.

This time it's the hikers who will pay.

You've seen this movie before: Threaten to kill or severely cut some service with passionate (or desperate) supporters. Offer up a disaster scenario if more money isn't produced. Then, after the initial wailing and public apoplexy, come up with a slightly lesser fleecing of this group to gain public compliance. Hey, it's only a few bucks and it will keep our (fill in the blank) hiking trails, softball fields, library hours, etc. etc. etc.

The Oscar for this performance came during the budget hearings, where police, firemen, libraries and seniors centers were offered up as sacrifices to the fiscal gods if the public didn't approve a \$50 million food tax. Take a wild guess where all the public hearings were held? Libraries and senior centers, naturally.

The ugly truth is that the \$100 million in new taxes and fees Phoenix has already imposed on its citizenry in the past seven months is not necessary to keep those services and protections. It's to find enough money to pay for 14,000-plus union-represented employees who average \$100,000 a year in compensation.

The parking fee – at trails you already pay for three ways – came about after the city drastically cut services and hours for parks, then gave the parks board the notion that if it didn't raise money for the general fund, much more would be cut. That's where the \$5 a day parking fee came up (later reduced to \$2 – hey, a comparative bargain). Then the city management promised that all the new dollars would go to parks.

First off, management can't guarantee that. Even the Council can't guarantee that.

On Sept. 15, the Phoenix City Council will be asked to approve enforcing this latest rummage through your pockets (3 p.m., Council Chambers, 200 W. Jefferson). No Council approval, no new fee. I say it's time to separate the taxing-and-spending addict from its drug, which is your money.

If you want to learn more, contact us. Or show up at the Council meeting and tell Phoenix it has enough of your money already. And be sure to send this around to your email list.

Councilman Sal DiCiccio represents District 6, which includes Ahwatukee, Arcadia, Biltmore, East Camelback and North Central. He can be reached at council.district.6@phoenix.gov.